PB82-198409

Chronic Toxicity of Lead and Cadmium: III Effects of Chronic Intoxication on the Reproductive Function of the F1 Generation of Rats and on the Central Nervous System of the F2 Generation

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Katowice (Poland)

Prepared for

Health Effects Research Lab.
Research Triangle Park, NC

1982

U.S. Department of Commerce
National Technical Information Service
NTIS

PB82-198409

EPA-600/1-82-006
April 1982

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by

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October 1981

Contract No. JB5-531-1

Project Officer

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Prepared for:

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Office of Research and Development
Washington, D.C. 20460

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1. REPORT NO.	2.	3. RECIPIENT'S ACCESSION NO.
EPA-600/1-82-006	ORD Report	PB82 198409

4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE	5. REPORT DATE
Chronic Toxicity of Lead and Cadmium: III. Effects of Chronic Intoxication on the Reproductive Function of the F_1 Generation and on the Central Nervous System of the F_2 Generation of Rats	March 1982
	6. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION CODE
7. AUTHOR(S) Z.S. Herman et al.	8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NO.
9. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME AND ADDRESS Silesian Medical Academy Katowice, Poland	10. PROGRAM ELEMENT NO. C9XA1C
	11. CONTRACT/GRANT NO. JB5-531-1
12. SPONSORING AGENCY NAME AND ADDRESS Health Effects Research Laboratory Office of Research and Development U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Research Triangle Park, NC 27711	13. TYPE OF REPORT AND PERIOD COVERED Final
	14. SPONSORING AGENCY CODE EPA-600/11

15. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

Project Officer: John Laskey

16. ABSTRACT

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Locomotor activity was seen to vary greatly but erratically after heavy metal treatment. Neurotransmitter levels also showed wide variations in response to heavy metal exposure, with the most notable being increases in noradrenaline in the hypothalamus and dopamine in the striatum. Serotonin and 5-hydroxyindoleacetic acid levels were less variable. Acetylcholinesterase activity in the brain was generally depressed by cadmium and long-term exposure to lead, while brain monoaminooxidase activity appeared elevated by lead and depressed by cadmium. Erythrocyte levels in the blood, as well as free erythrocyte porphyrin levels, were elevated for animals of both sexes exposed to either metal, as were hemoglobin and hematocrit levels, but the numbers of leukocytes were sometimes reduced in animals given low dosages of both metals.

Weight gains during gestation, litter sizes, survival of offspring and average size of surviving offspring were all depressed in groups of treated animals, and eye-opening was delayed in these progeny groups.

17. KEY WORDS AND DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

a. DESCRIPTORS	b. IDENTIFIERS/OPEN ENDED TERMS	c. COSATI Field/Group
Lead Cadmium Toxicity		

18. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT	19. SECURITY CLASS (This Report)	21. NO. OF PAGES
RELEASE TO PUBLIC	UNCLASSIFIED	21
	20. SECURITY CLASS (This page) UNCLASSIFIED	22. PRICE

EPA Form 2220-1 (9-73)

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ABSTRACT

Wistar rats, descended from animals used in previous toxicity studies, were administered lead and cadmium via drinking water and examined for changes in locomotor activity, neurochemicals levels in various brain regions, concentrations of heavy metals in liver and kidney, blood components, and reproductive ability and viability of offspring.

Locomotor activity was seen to vary greatly after heavy metal treatment, but with no clear pattern of response evident. Neurotransmitter levels also showed wide variations in response to heavy metal exposure, with the most notable being increases in noradrenaline in the hypothalamus and dopamine in the striatum. Serotonin and 5-hydroxyindoleacetic acid levels were less variable. Acetylcholinesterase activity in the brain was generally depressed by cadmium and long-term exposure to lead, while brain monoaminooxidase activity appeared elevated by lead and depressed by cadmium. Erythrocyte levels in the blood, as well as free erythrocyte porphyrin levels, were elevated for animals of both sexes exposed to either metal, as were hemoglobin and hematocrit levels, but the numbers of leukocytes were sometimes reduced in animals given low dosages of both metals.

Weight gains during gestation, litter sizes, survival of offspring and average size of surviving offspring were all depressed in groups of animals treated with the metals, and eye-opening was delayed in these groups.

SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

In previous studies the toxic effects of lead and cadmium in parent and offspring Wistar rats were examined (Herman et al., 1980, 1981). In those studies high concentrations of lead were seen generally to lower the noradrenaline concentrations in all areas of the brain except the limbic system, to alter the locomotor activity of the animals, and to enhance the levels of free erythrocyte porphyrins. The present studies are a continuation and extension of the above-mentioned studies and were conducted on the progeny of the animals studied previously. The goals of the current work are (1) to determine which biochemical or physiological parameters studied previously yield reproducible responses when rats are exposed to lead or cadmium, (2) to determine if any long-term alteration in response results from exposure of successive generations to the heavy metals, and (3) to assess the effect of heavy metal exposure on reproductive ability.

SECTION 2

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Exposure

All studies were performed on Wistar rats descended from animals used in previous toxicity studies (Herman et al., 1980, 1981). The parent animals had been administered lead or cadmium, or both, in low or high concentrations in the drinking water beginning on their 40th day and pregnant females continued on this regimen through gestation and lactation. Their offspring (the F_1 generation) were similarly exposed beginning 30 days after birth, again through gestation and lactation, and their offspring (the F_2 generation) were subjected to the same exposure beginning on their 30th day. Figure 1 illustrates the exposure sequence for all three generations of rats in these studies.

Locomotor Activity

Animal activity was monitored by use of photocells connected to a cage, with motor activity considered proportional to the number of times light beams were interrupted. Individual rats were placed in this actionmeter for 24 h at a time, and total impulses were recorded from counters every 12 h, corresponding to daytime and nighttime activity.

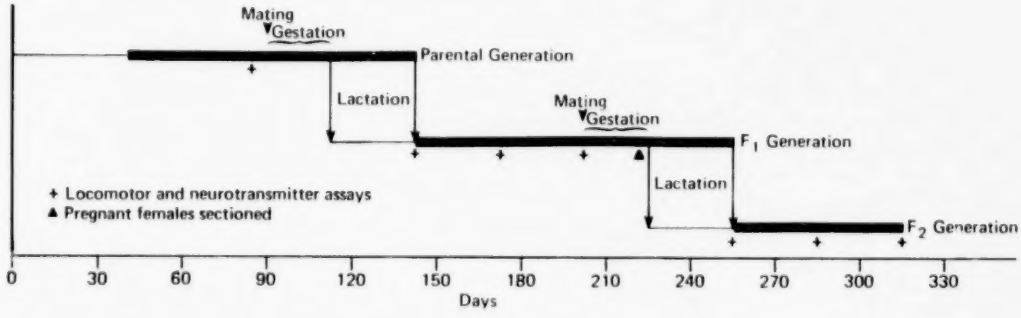

Figure 1. Regimen of heavy metal exposure for the three generations of Wistar rats used in this and previous (Herman, 1980, 1981) toxicity studies. Each F_1 and F_2 exposure group and control group were progeny of animals exposed to similar metal concentrations.

Biogenic Amines Activity

Rats were sacrificed by cervical dislocation and their brains were removed and stored on ice. The brains were dissected into the following regions: hypothalamus, pons and medulla oblongata (brain stem), hippocampus with nucleus accumbens (limbic system) and striatum. Spectrofluorometric analysis was performed on each brain section to determine the concentrations of the following amines: noradrenaline, serotonin, dopamine and 5-hydroxy indoleacetic acid (5-HIAA).

Biochemical Assays

Blood samples were collected from anesthetized animals by heart puncture, after which the carotid and subclavian arteries were perfused with 4° saline solution. Brains were removed, frozen in dry ice, weighed, homogenized in five parts of 0.067 sodium phosphate buffer and chilled. The following enzyme activities were assayed: aminolevulinic acid dehydratase (E.C. 4.2.1.2.4), free erythrocyte porphyrins, acetylcholinesterase, and monamine oxidase.

Reproductive Ability

Animals of the F_1 generation received lead and/or cadmium in their drinking water at the same concentrations administered to the parents. Levels of peripheral blood components (erythrocytes, leukocytes, hemoglobin and hematocrit) were estimated in 90- to 100-day-old animals. At the same time vaginal smears were made for females to determine the mean time of the estrous cycle. Animals were mated in the proestrous phase, and when vaginal plugs were proved, the females were housed in separate cages. The offspring of these females were the F_2 generation.

Parameters used to quantify the generative ability of the treated rats include weight gains in pregnant and offspring rats, number of pups per litter, number of live births and survivors at the 4th and 21st day, and the implantation and resorption number for fetuses in females sectioned on the 20th day of pregnancy.

Tissue Samples

Samples of liver (2g) and kidney (1g) were taken immediately after animal sacrifice. The tissues were dried and burnt in a muffle furnace at 550°C for 30 min, after which 2.5 volumes of nitric acid were added and the samples were evaporated and burned again. This process was repeated several times until only a white residue remained. This residue was dissolved in 50 ml of 0.1 N nitric acid and water was added to yield a final volume of 100 ml. Cadmium and lead were complexed with ammonium pyrrolidine dicarbonium (APDC) and the complex was extracted by shaking with methylisobutyl ketone. The ketone layer was decanted and centrifuged, and the lead and cadmium concentrations were estimated by comparison of the atomic absorption spectra with those of known standard solutions. For lead, the wavelength 228.8 nm was the reference point.

SECTION 3

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Locomotor Activity

Table 1 presents the results of the studies of locomotor activity in F_2 generation rats. Values varied widely within the different test groups, with no consistent pattern discernible. Comparison of changes from control group values in this generation and in the F_1 generation (Herman et al., 1981) also gave inconclusive results: at least as many groups showed opposite as similar effects when considered pairwise, and the values for the control groups in the two generations also showed wide variations.

Amine Levels in Discrete Brain Areas

Table 2 summarizes the results of assays of noradrenaline levels in four brain regions from 30-, 60- and 90-day-old F_2 generation rats. Each entry in the table represents an average value for eight animals. The noradrenaline concentrations for each brain region remained fairly constant for the control animals over the course of the study, but greater variations were seen in the noradrenaline levels for the animals treated with the heavy metals. No consistent pattern of response was readily apparent for any brain region throughout the study, except in the hypothalamus, where high dosages of cadmium plus lead resulted in enhanced noradrenaline levels. Of the 72 test groups, nearly half showed statistically significant changes in noradrenaline levels, all but two being enhancement. Similarly, very large (over double) increases of dopamine levels in the striatum were noted in some treated groups (Table 2), although here the assay uncertainties were rather large.

The levels of serotonin and 5-hydroxyinodoleacetic acid (5-HIAA) from the same four brain regions are listed in Tables 3 and 4, respectively. The range of variation in the levels of these two neurotransmitters and the number of groups exhibiting significant differences from the control groups were less than for the dopamine assay.

Biochemical Assays

Table 5 lists the results of the biochemical assays on groups of F_2 generation rats given cadmium or lead, or both, and sacrificed after 30, 60 or 90 days. With but one exception, the aminolevulinic acid dehydratase activity in the blood appeared unaffected by administration of the metals. Acetylcholinesterase activity in brain tissue appeared generally depressed by cadmium and by longer exposures to lead. Brain monoaminooxidase activities varied

greatly for different test groups and appeared highly elevated by long-term exposure to lead, reduced by long-term exposure to high cadmium concentrations, and unpredictable after exposure to both metals. The most notable and consistent change was in the level of free erythrocyte porphyrins, where exposure to lead or lead plus cadmium uniformly resulted in large increases in porphyrin concentration.

Reproductive Ability

Rats of the F_1 generation treated with lead and cadmium for 90 to 100 days were sacrificed and their blood was assayed for hemoglobin levels and morphological elements (Table 6). Most of the male groups exhibited slight increases in number of erythrocytes as a result of metal exposure; this increase was more pronounced in females. The hemoglobin levels and hematocrit values for the various groups roughly followed the erythrocyte levels, but the number of leukocytes were in some cases reduced in the treated animals, most notably in the groups given low levels of both cadmium and lead.

Table 7 lists the results from the mating study of F_1 generation females. The weight gains of the females during gestation, litter size, survival of offspring and average size of surviving offspring all were reduced in test groups administered lead or cadmium, and all of these changes were more severe in the groups receiving both metals simultaneously. The appearance of postural reflexes was relatively invariant in all groups, but the appearance of eye opening was delayed by at least a day in all groups administered metals.

Figures 2 and 3 show the average weights of the F_2 generation rats for their first 90 days. At the end of this period, animals given both metals weighed about 8% less on average than the control animals. Table 8 presents the results from the survey of F_1 generation female rats sectioned on the 20th day of pregnancy. The average number of fetuses not implanted but resorbed increased with exposure to lead and cadmium. The mean number of corpora lutea per female remained unaffected by exposure to the metals.

Tissue Samples

Tables 9 and 10 list the lead and cadmiun concentrations from liver and kidney samples for rats of the F_1 and F_2 generations, respectively. For most test groups, the concentration of metals in the liver was highest when the animals were 60 days old and substantially reduced at 90 days. The metal concentration in the kidney generally stayed constant or increased during the course of exposure, except in the case of simultaneous exposure to both metals. In most cases concentrations in tissue from F_1 generation animals were equal or slightly higher than those from corresponding F_2 generation groups. Little difference in cadmium accumulation was noted between the low- and high-dose groups in each generation. Large differences, but no clear pattern, were observed between groups given single metals and those given equal concentrations plus a second metal.

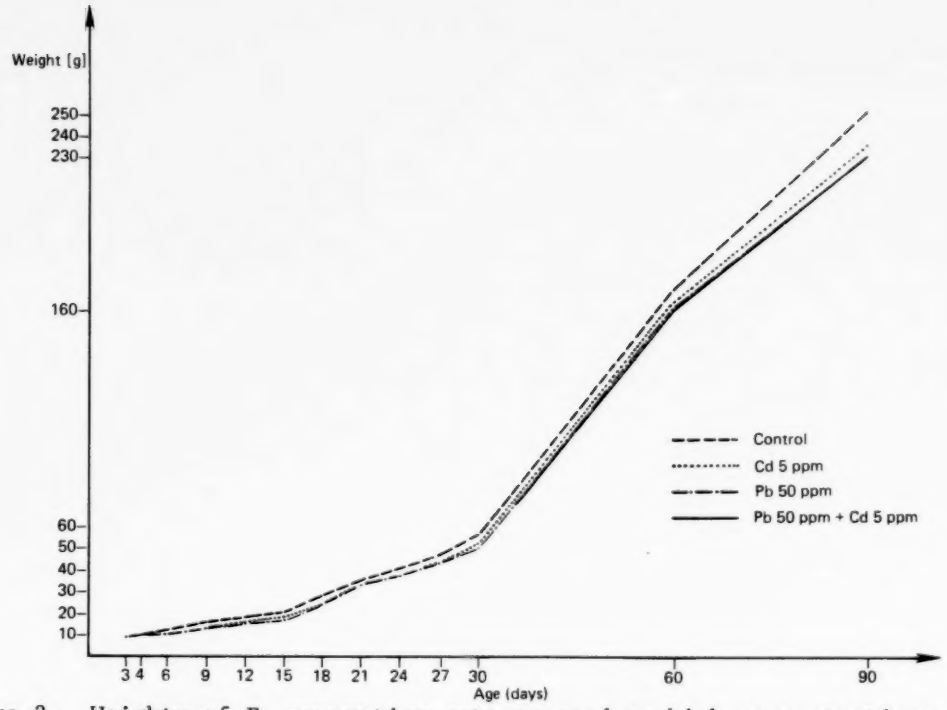

Figure 2. Weights of F_2 generation rats exposed to high concentrations of heavy metals.

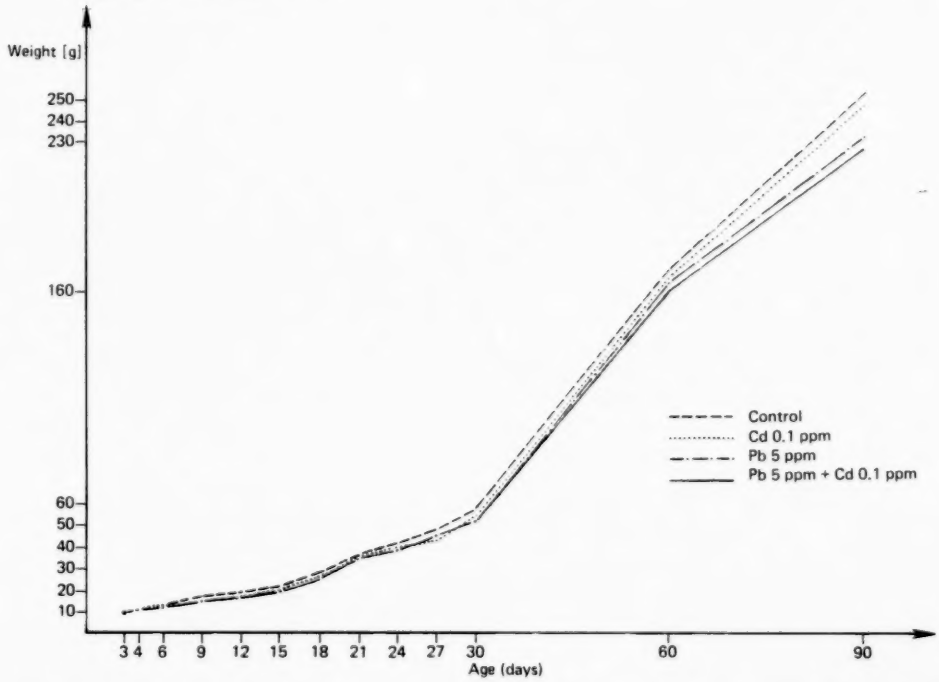

Figure 3. Weights of F_2 generation rats exposed to low concentrations of heavy metals.

TABLE 1. LOCOMOTOR ACTIVITY OF F_2 GENERATION RATS AFTER TREATMENT WITH LEAD AND CADMIUM.

	Age (days)	Metals Administered (ppm)						
		Control	Pb(5)	Pb(50)	Cd(0.1)	Cd(5)	Pb(5)+Cd(0.1)	Pb(50)+Cd(5)
	30	1064	574	2507	1231	454	780	768
Day	60	395	305	566	515	1223	918	636
	90	619	354	656	712	1244	393	469
	30	1778	541	1864	2232	738	695	573
Night	60	587	1180	317	295	912	1093	2107
	90	656	480	417	820	1297	421	418

TABLE 2. NORADRENALINE (NA) AND DOPAMINE (DA) LEVELS IN VARIOUS BRAIN REGIONS OF F_2 GENERATION RATS AFTER EXPOSURE TO LEAD OR CADMIUM. EACH ENTRY REPRESENTS AN AVERAGE FOR EIGHT ANIMALS ASSAYED, IN UNITS OF µg/g OF TISSUE.

Part of Brain	Age (days)	Metals Administered (ppm)						
		Control	Pb(5)	Pb(50)	Cd(0.1)	Cd(5)	Pb(5)+Cd(0.1)	Pb(50)+Cd(5)
NA in Hypothalamus	30	2.27	3.48	2.06	2.48	4.17	3.32	3.18
	60	2.50	2.37	3.00	2.54	2.59	2.44	3.10
	90	2.32	3.17	2.81	1.45	3.03	2.24	2.95
NA in Pons + Medulla Oblongata	30	0.67	1.06	0.70	0.80	1.18	0.86	0.88
	60	0.66	0.65	0.68	0.70	0.75	0.67	0.75
	90	0.71	0.83	0.81	0.55	0.78	0.61	0.77
NA in Limbic System	30	0.48	0.62	0.55	0.50	0.59	0.65	0.63
	60	0.51	0.45	0.43	0.50	0.54	0.49	0.55
	90	0.51	0.73	0.74	0.42	0.67	0.50	0.66
NA in Striatum	30	0.22	0.25	0.23	0.31	0.17	0.20	0.47
	60	0.22	0.27	0.37	0.13	0.26	0.30	0.21
	90	0.19	0.32	0.19	0.12	0.32	0.11	0.35
DA in Striatum	30	5.99	12.17	7.09	14.33	10.93	8.65	10.81
	60	6.22	7.13	7.33	8.99	9.12	4.14	6.54
	90	6.17	8.93	7.51	6.50	16.23	6.58	10.06

TABLE 3. SEROTONIN LEVELS (μg/g OF TISSUE) FROM VARIOUS BRAIN REGIONS FOR F_2 GENERATION RATS TREATED WITH LEAD AND CADMIUM. EACH ENTRY REPRESENTS THE AVERAGE FOR EIGHT ANIMALS ASSAYED.

Part of Brain	Age (days)	Metals Administered (ppm)						
		Control	Pb(5)	Pb(50)	Cd(0.1)	Cd(5)	Pb(5)+Cd(0.1)	Pb(50)+Cd(5)
Hypothalamus	30	1.53	1.64	1.27	1.30	1.63	1.70	1.60
	60	1.55	1.40	1.57	1.87	1.40	1.39	1.48
	90	1.77	1.95	1.43	1.99	1.57	2.12	1.46
Pons + Medulla Oblongata	30	0.95	1.38	0.93	0.96	1.41	1.31	1.24
	60	0.86	0.95	0.96	0.91	0.97	1.01	0.88
	90	1.05	1.15	1.11	0.84	0.87	1.14	0.82
Limbic System	30	0.85	1.01	1.03	0.90	0.44	0.78	0.76
	60	0.71	1.18	1.05	1.13	1.21	1.22	0.67
	90	0.87	0.56	0.69	0.79	0.74	0.83	0.48
Striatum	30	0.93	1.10	1.01	0.96	1.23	1.17	1.04
	60	0.97	0.96	0.94	0.90	1.22	1.05	1.06
	90	0.92	0.95	0.68	0.64	0.90	0.82	1.00

TABLE 4. 5-HYDROXYINDOLEACETIC ACID LEVELS (μg/g OF TISSUE) FROM VARIOUS BRAIN REGIONS OF F_2 GENERATION RATS TREATED WITH LEAD AND CADMIUM. EACH ENTRY REPRESENTS THE AVERAGE FOR EIGHT ANIMALS ASSAYED.

Part of Brain	Age (days)	Metals Administered (ppm)						
		Control	Pb(5)	Pb(50)	Cd(0.1)	Cd(5)	Pb(5)+Cd(0.1)	Pb(50)+Cd(5)
Hypothalamus	30	1.61	1.72	1.21	1.74	1.56	1.41	1.58
	60	1.63	1.66	1.65	1.99	1.49	1.30	1.45
	90	1.57	1.35	1.11	1.81	1.67	1.40	1.16
Pons + Medulla Oblongata	30	0.64	0.93	0.50	0.67	0.90	0.88	0.83
	60	0.65	0.59	0.85	0.59	0.61	0.85	0.91
	90	0.65	0.78	0.77	0.64	0.52	0.53	0.51
Limbic System	30	0.71	0.48	0.83	0.71	0.61	0.58	0.52
	60	0.69	0.41	0.44	0.39	0.46	0.46	0.53
	90	0.70	0.76	0.79	0.76	0.71	0.52	0.47
Striatum	30	0.81	0.74	0.72	0.58	0.79	0.71	0.82
	60	0.83	0.81	0.87	0.76	0.93	0.93	0.85
	90	0.83	0.95	0.87	0.89	0.94	0.82	0.67

TABLE 5. BIOCHEMICAL ASSAYS FOR F_2 GENERATION RATS ADMINISTERED LEAD OR CADMIUM. EACH ENTRY REPRESENTS THE AVERAGE FOR TEN ANIMALS ASSAYED.

Assay	Age (days)	Metals Administered (ppm)						
		Control	Pb(5)	Pb(50)	Cd(0.1)	Cd(5)	Pb(5)+Cd(0.1)	Pb(50)+Cd(5)
Blood ALA Dehydratase (μmole/h/l)	30	85	147	37			47	85
	60	48	33	27			44	48
	90	53	33	21			29	22
Brain Acetyl-cholinesterase (μmole/min/g)	30	7.2	7.4	7.2	1.9	3.6	5.1	8.5
	60	8.9	1.6	7.0	7.1	1.4	3.6	9.2
	90	9.4	4.2	3.5	4.4	5.0	5.0	6.2
Brain Mono-aminooxidase (μmole/h/g)	30	111	171	73	65	386	38	323
	60	50	108	126	589	32	103	552
	90	104	425	413	185	26	461	172
Free Erythrocyte Porphyrins (μg/l)	30	190	411	348			359	300
	60	197	317	317			343	374
	90	126	295	295			612	317

TABLE 6. BLOOD ASSAYS FOR F_1 GENERATIONS RATS TREATED WITH LEAD OR CADMIUM. EACH ENTRY REPRESENTS THE AVERAGE FOR FIVE ANIMALS TESTED.

Metals Administered (ppm)	Erythrocytes/mm^3 ($x10^{-6}$)		Leukocytes/mm^3 ($x10^{-3}$)		Hemoglobin (g%)		Hematocrit (g%)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Control	6.336	6.141	7.56	7.25	14.1	13.8	44.0	42.6
Pb(5)	6.570	6.588	5.95	6.90	15.9	16.0	45.5	46.0
Pb(50)	6.224	6.500	7.50	7.40	15.9	15.5	46.0	45.0
Cd(0.1)	6.710	6.524	6.10	8.20	16.8	16.1	47.0	45.0
Cd(5)	6.228	6.700	7.52	7.04	14.4	16.6	43.2	46.5
Pb(5)+Cd(0.1)	6.450	6.426	5.80	5.60	16.2	15.8	47.0	45.0
Pb(50)+Cd(5)	6.426	6.570	7.51	7.22	15.2	16.0	44.6	45.7

TABLE 7. EFFECTS OF LEAD AND CADMIUM TREATMENT ON GESTATION AND PROGENY OF F_1 GENERATION FEMALE RATS.

Test Parameter	Metals Administered (ppm)						
	Control	Pb(5)	Pb(50)	Cd(0.1)	Cd(5)	Pb(5)+Cd(0.1)	Pb(50)+Cd(5)
Number Mated	20	20	20	20	20	20	20
Number Pregnant	20	20	19	20	20	19	18
Number after Parturition	20	19	19	20	19	19	18
Mean Weight Increase During Gestation Period (g)	79.8	74.1	70.0	75.8	71.1	73.2	69.2
Total Number of Progeny	178	146	158	161	163	140	147
Live Births	177	139	152	154	158	132	137
Progeny Surviving 4 Days	176	136	149	150	152	130	129
Progeny Surviving 21 Days	174	130	145	150	150	123	127
Mean Weight of 4-Day Old Pup (g)	10.4	9.7	9.6	9.7	9.7	9.5	9.3
Mean Weight of 21-day Old Pup (g)	35.2	33.8	33.0	34.0	33.1	34.1	32.8
Mean Postural Reflex Appearance (days)	3.7	3.9	3.8	3.7	3.9	3.8	4.0
Mean Eye Opening Appearance (days)	12.2	14.0	13.8	13.8	14.1	13.1	13.5

TABLE 8. SURVEY OF F_1 GENERATION FEMALE RATS SECTIONED ON THE 20TH DAY OF PREGNANCY. VALUES ARE AVERAGES FOR 15 ANIMALS PER GROUP.

Parameter	Metals Administered (ppm)						
	Control	Pb(5)	Pb(50)	Cd(0.1)	Cd(5)	Pb(5)+Cd(0.1)	Pb(50)+Cd(5)
Mean Number of Fetuses	10.1	7.9	9.1	8.0	9.0	7.7	7.7
Mean Number of Resorption	0.4	1.2	1.1	1.0	1.2	1.3	2.0
Mean Number of Corpora Lutea	11.3	10.3	11.5	10.5	12.0	10.4	11.3

TABLE 9. LEAD AND CADMIUM CONCENTRATIONS (μg/g OF TISSUE) IN THE LIVER AND KIDNEY OF F_1 GENERATION RATS. EACH ENTRY REPRESENTS THE AVERAGE FOR TEN ANIMALS ASSAYED.

Organ	Age (days)	Metals Administered (ppm)									
		Pb(5)	Pb(50)	Cd(0.1)	Cd(5)	Pb(5)+Cd(0.1)		Pb(50)+Cd(5)		Control	
						Pb	Cd	Pb	Cd	Pb	Cd
Liver	30	1.656	3.006	0.428	0.446	3.176	0.800	1.966	0.516	1.352	0.324
	60	3.076	3.210	0.670	0.702	3.098	0.692	3.250	0.708	1.362	0.332
	90	1.588	1.826	0.410	0.456	2.452	0.426	1.808	0.472	1.322	0.322
Kidney	30	1.556	2.700	0.482	0.492	3.466	1.683	1.714	0.552	1.228	0.406
	60	2.422	2.802	0.816	0.878	2.822	1.018	3.250	0.994	1.152	0.408
	90	2.778	3.186	1.140	1.292	2.982	1.192	1.606	0.542	1.208	0.336

TABLE 10. LEAD AND CADMIUM CONCENTRATIONS (μg/g OF TISSUE) IN THE LIVER AND KIDNEY OF F_2 GENERATION RATS. EACH ENTRY REPRESENTS THE AVERAGE FOR TEN ANIMALS ASSAYED.

Organ	Age (days)	Metals Administered (ppm)									
		Pb(5)	Pb(50)	Cd(0.1)	Cd(5)	Pb(5)+Cd(0.1)		Pb(50)+Cd(5)		Control	
						Pb	Cd	Pb	Cd	Pb	Cd
Liver	30	1.479	2.690	0.389	0.396	2.731	0.692	1.732	0.435	1.148	0.274
	60	2.851	3.112	0.579	0.597	2.695	0.521	1.986	0.632	1.040	0.269
	90	1.405	1.479	0.592	0.390	2.630	0.405	1.742	0.484	1.115	0.293
Kidney	30	1.490	2.865	0.412	0.413	3.012	1.320	1.790	0.395	1.035	0.352
	60	2.611	2.701	0.613	0.508	2.613	0.925	2.375	0.821	1.112	0.401
	90	2.524	3.013	1.230	1.134	3.112	1.413	1.535	0.754	1.069	0.279

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